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ABSTRACT

This lesson plan, featuring the epic, "Beowulf," employs the introduction-quotation exchange to monitor student comprehension while reading the epic. A second exercise, also dealing with reading comprehension, requires students to keep an historical evidence journal and fill out an historical evidence chart. The lesson plan features a hero's journey map with questions for students to answer. The journey map exercise helps students understand that all cultures have hero figures and how heroes from cultures that appear to be very different from each other often have similarities. Contains a specific section outlining Beowulf's journey. (BT)

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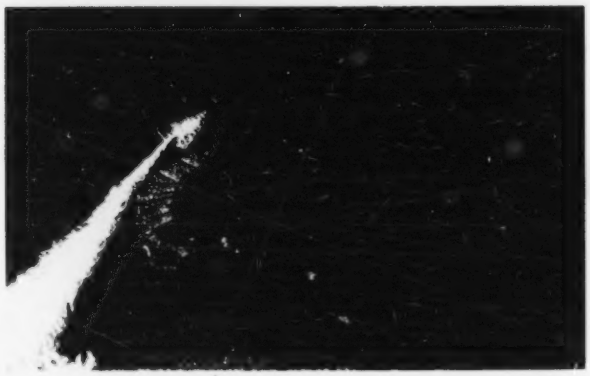
Lessons from ORIAS Institute on History Through Literature

in the 6th Grade/7th Grade Core Classrooms 1998-2000

Beowulf

By Carolyn Rinetti



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Using History Through Literature

Beowulf

Carolyn Rinetti, 7th grade teacher at Pleasanton Middle School, wrote up this lesson plan for Beowulf. It can be easily adapted to other non-Western epic heroes.

Introduction-Quotation Exchange

1. Hand out strips of paper with quotations from Beowulf to each student

2. Have students read their quotation strips to each other for about 5 minutes.

3. Have students return to their seats. At this point they can (a) each read their quote aloud to the whole class or (b) do a quick write or journal entry in which they predict what they think the story will be about based on the quotations they have heard and read.

4. As a whole class, discuss what students believe the story will be about. Record student predictions where the whole class can see them.

5. Read aloud the section of the story from which the quotes were taken. Either have students take turns reading or have them read in "play" form. In play form reading, students are selected to read the dialogue of each character as if it were a play and others take turns (usually a page at a time) reading the narrative prose.

6. After the reading is completed, have the students reflect, either in discussion or in writing, on how their predictions compared with what actually happened in the story. They could also discuss how what they have read reflects what they may have learned about life in the early Middle Ages.

Historical Evidence Journal

1. Students can record this information in either journal or chart form:

Chart Form: Have students take a piece of drawing paper and fold it in a way that creates eight sections. Have students label sections with the following headings:

- Shelter and housing
- Weapons and methods of warfare
- Food and clothing
- Entertainment and communication
- Transportation
- Leadership and social organization
- Christianity
- Pagan gods and goddesses

Journal Form: Have students use the headings listed above to label sections in their journals.

2. Explain to students that as they read the book they will be writing sentences or phrases from the story that describe items covered by the headings listed above. Discuss each of the headings and give some examples of items they might find in the story that fall into those categories.

3. After students have finished reading the book and have completed their historical evidence charts, bring them together as a class to share the evidence they have collected. To streamline the process, students can work in small groups to produce a chart listing all the information the members of that group found on one topic. When students are finished, have them post the charts around the room and then discuss them as a class.

4. Summary: You can summarize the information in several ways. Students can write a summary paragraph about the early Middle Ages based on the evidence they have seen; they can compose a summary sentence (either as a class or individually) for each category; or they can create posters illustrating their evidence.

Historical Evidence Chart

Shelter and Housing	Weapons & methods of Warfare	Food and Clothing	Entertainment & Communication
Transportation	Leadership & Social Organization	Christianity	Pagan Gods and Goddesses

Hero's Journey Map

1. Discuss with students how all cultures have hero figures and how even heroes from cultures that appear to be very different from each other often have similarities.

2. Use a hero figure with whom students are familiar to explain the hero's journey chart. (The King Arthur story works well.)

The Hero's Journey Chart

a. He establishes his reputation by overcoming hardships or challenges early in his life.

b. The hero goes on a journey

c. The hero faces one or more challenges

d. The hero overcomes the challenges and triumphs

e. Returns home to his people with a trophy or some item that benefits them

3. After you have gone through the chart once, ask students if they can think of modern mythic heroes who fit this story line. Most students will come up with some action figures that fit the outline. (Luke Skywalker in Star Wars is one good example.)

4. Fill out the hero's journey chart using the character of Beowulf:

Beowulf's Journey

a. As a youth, Beowulf overcomes nine sea-monsters during a swimming contest.

b. Beowulf sails to the land of the Danes to fight the monster Grendel

c. Beowulf fights Grendel without his sword

d. Beowulf defeats Grendel through his goodness and physical strength

e. Beowulf presents Grendel's arm to King Hrothgar as proof of this triumph

5. Journey Map. Pass out drawing paper and ask students to find sentences or phrases in the story that describe each of the five steps in Beowulf's journey. Have them copy the sentence or phrase they find for each step and illustrate it. They can then connect the five steps into a "map." Students can also use a comic book format to illustrate the five steps.

Heroes Journey Chart

He establishes his reputation by overcoming hardships or challenges early in his life.	
The hero goes on a journey	
The hero faces one or more challenges	
The hero overcomes the challenges and triumphs	
Returns home to his people with a trophy or some item that benefits them	

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